

## Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-06

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S E C R E T STATE 180501 TOSEC 080201

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN COUP ANALYSIS

SUMMARY: THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THE SUCCESSFUL OUSTING OF NIGERIA'S GENERAL YAKUBU GOWON PRESENTS ANY THREAT AT THIS TIME TO US INTERESTS OR THAT IT WAS PRECIPITATED BY OTHER THAN INTERNAL NIGERIAN PROBLEMS. HOWEVER, FAILURE OF THE MILITARY TO COALESCE AROUND A REPLACEMENT MIGHT PROVOKE DISTURBANCES ENDANGERING US INVESTMENTS AND THE SUPPLY OF NIGERIAN CRUDE TO THE UNITED STATES. PROLONGED POLITICAL UNCERTAINTIES IN NIGERIA COULD ALSO PROVIDE TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY TO OUTSIDERS. END SUMMARY

1. ALTHOUGH A NEW CHIEF OF STATE, BRIG. MURTALA MUHAMMED, AND NEW SENIOR MILITARY COMMANDERS HAVE BEEN NAMED, IT IS UNCLEAR WHO CONCEIVED AND ORGANIZED THE COUP THAT OVERTHREW GENERAL GOWON. THE ORIGINAL ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE  
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ON BEHALF OF THE NIGERIAN ARMED FORCES, BUT THE TIME IT IS TAKING TO FORM A GOVERNMENT SUGGESTS LESS UNITY THAN THE ANNOUNCEMENT PORTRAYED OR SOME SURPRISE AMONG THE PLOTTERS AT THE EASE OF THEIR APPARENT SUCCESS. MUHAMMED AND THE

SENIOR COMMANDERS NAMED YESTERDAY WERE ALMOST ALL HIGH OFFICIALS IN THE GOWON REGIME, WHICH PROVIDES SOME BASIS FOR EXPECTING THAT GOWON'S NON-ALIGNED AND MODERATE POLICIES WILL BE CONTINUED. UNLIKE WHAT HAPPENED IN ETHIOPIA, THE INITIAL STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE NEW REGIME HAD NO IDEOLOGICAL CONTENT. FROM ALL INDICATIONS, DISSATISFACTION WITH GOWON FOCUSED ON HIS INABILITY TO DEAL WITH GROWING INTERNAL ECONOMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS, NOT BECAUSE HIS FOREIGN POLICIES WERE UNPOPULAR. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE COUP.

2. NIGERIA'S 263,000 MAN ARMY, THE LARGEST IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, CAN CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL LIFE, PROVIDED IT REMAINS UNIFIED. TWICE, HOWEVER, IN THE FIFTEEN YEARS SINCE INDEPENDENCE TRIBAL CLEAVAGES WITHIN THE MILITARY PROVOKED BLOODY CONFRONTATION. A NUMBER OF POWERFUL NIGERIAN OFFICERS HAVE NOT BEEN INCLUDED ON THE SHORT LIST OF THOSE IDENTIFIED UP TO NOW WITH THE NEW REGIME. THIS MAY PRESAGE STRAINS IN THE NEAR-TERM FUTURE. BRIG. MUHAMMED'S ASCENDANCY WILL WORRY THE IBOS WHO WOULD HAVE SUFFERED VENGEFUL REPRESSION INSTEAD OF GOWON'S HUMANE RECONCILIATION HAD MUHAMMED'S PREFERENCE PREVAILED AFTER THE BIAFRAN WAR. IF, AS SOME REPORTS SUGGEST, THE COUP WAS ORGANIZED BY FIELD GRADE OFFICERS, THE OUTLOOK IS EVEN MORE CLOUDY. HOWEVER, AN ETHIOPIAN PARALLEL SEEMS UNLIKELY, AS THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY IS ON THE UPSWING, AND SOCIAL TENSIONS ARE MORE MODERATE WITHIN THE NIGERIAN BODY POLITIC.

3. A GOWON REGIME WITHOUT GOWON WILL CONTINUE TO BE INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING THE OIL INDUSTRY AND THE REST OF THE ECONOMY. (WE PROVIDE THE MARKET FOR ABOUT 50 PERCENT OF NIGERIA'S CRUDE EXPORTS AND, AT LEAST IN THE SHORT TERM, THE NIGERIANS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE MARKETABILITY OF THEIR OIL.) THE MOST DANGEROUS SITUATION FOR US ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN NIGERIA WOULD BE THE OUTBREAK  
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OF ANOTHER CIVIL WAR, A DEVELOPMENT TO WHICH WE CURRENTLY ASSIGN A LOW PROBABILITY, OR PROLONGED UNCERTAINTY IN THE FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT. IN THE LATTER CASE, IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT EXTERNAL ELEMENTS HOSTILE TO US INTERESTS COULD SEEK TO EXPLOIT THE SITUATION TO THEIR ADVANTAGE. THERE IS, AS YET, NO SIGN OF ANY SUCH ELEMENTS AT WORK.

4. IN HIS FIRST ADDRESS TO THE NATION, BRIG. MUHAMMED WELCOMED FRIENDSHIP WITH ALL COUNTRIES, ASSURED THE PROTECTION OF FOREIGN INVESTMENTS, AND PLEDGED HIS GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORT FOR THE OAU, UN AND THE COMMONWEALTH. ON TWO SENSITIVE DOMESTIC ISSUES WITH HEAVY TRIBAL OVERTONES

HE APPEARED TO REJECT THE 1973 CENSUS, THUS DOUBTLESS  
ANNOYING THE POPULOUSNORTH, AND SAID CONSIDERATION WILL BE  
GIVEN TO RELOCATING THE CAPITAL, WHICH WILL ANGER THE

YORUBAS IN WHOSE HOMELAND LAGOS IS LOCATED.

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